United Nations E/C.16/2017/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
30 January 2017

Original: English

Committee of Experts on Public Administration
Sixteenth session
New York, 24-28 April 2017
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Ensuring effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through leadership, action and means

Successfully achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: what is to be done?

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee member Allan Rosenbaum in collaboration with Vaiva Kalesnikaite of Florida International University. The content of the paper and the views expressed therein are those of the author and do not imply any expression of opinion on the part of the United Nations.

* E/C.16/2017/1.

17-01160 (E) 150217

Please recycle

Successfully achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: what is to be done?

Summary

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will require significant capacity in terms of effective government institutions, possessed of adequate financial capacity and human resources. To gain a better understanding of both the institutional processes and structures that are likely to facilitate successful implementation, the author briefly examines four countries — Germany, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa — that have had varied experiences in introducing sustainable development objectives into national development strategies. The evidence suggests that the success of national efforts to implement the Goals will depend substantially on government capacity and the effectiveness of a country's public sector.

The present paper calls for strengthening the governmental institutions whose effective performance is essential for the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Ten recommendations are made, which together emphasize the central role of Government, the need for an adequate and dependable revenue base, effective budgeting and planning processes, citizen empowerment, accountability and transparency, local capacity, strong management capacity and information systems, partnership between local and central governments, coalitions with civil society and the private sector and an acknowledgement of the complexity and fragility of reform processes.

Prior experience with the Millennium Development Goals has helped countries to learn what works in their national context and what can be done to improve policy formulation and implementation in the future. Institutional structures developed for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of progress in sustainable development generally, as well as public participation measures designed while implementing the Millennium Development Goals, should therefore aid in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. By putting prior experience to use, countries can significantly reduce the amount of new administrative resources needed to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, provided implementation is underpinned by leadership, action and resources at both the national and local levels, as well as by efforts to make the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development better known to people all over the world.

I. Introduction

1. The promulgation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals represents one of the most significant efforts at seeking social, economic and environmental change in the history of the United Nations. If the Goals are successfully implemented by all, or even by a large number of the nations of the world, they will profoundly improve the well-being of humankind and especially of the most disadvantaged elements of the world's population. As such, they represent, in essence, a blueprint for and/or a road map to the building of a "good society". However, as the experience of the Millennium Development Goals has illustrated, it will be impossible to achieve such all-encompassing goals without effective government institutions possessed of adequate financial and human resources.

2. In many respects, the experience of the Millennium Development Goals, whose implementation was undertaken from 2000 to 2015, can provide guidance with regard to potential strategies as well as pathways to success in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. The experience also illustrates the obstacles that have to be overcome to achieve successful implementation of the complex economic, environmental and social objectives that make up the Sustainable Development Goals. For a number of reasons, it is not possible to equate exactly efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals with prior efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals. The situation of the world is, in a number of ways, more complex than it was in 2000. Nevertheless, the successful achievement of some elements of the Millennium Development Goals, especially in the areas of improved health and the elimination of extreme poverty, provides a foundation of substantive progress upon which to build in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, knowledge generated through the processes of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals does provide guidance with regard to what is required for successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, while there have been a variety of reports assessing the achievement of specific Millennium Development Goals, there have been only a handful of studies that seek to systematically understand the factors that led to successful implementation of some Goals.

3. One of the most informative of these efforts is a November 2015 working paper entitled "National MDG implementation: lessons for the SDG era", by Moizza Binate Sarwar.[1] In the introduction to the paper, Sarwar notes that "[t]he Millennium Goals gave low and middle-income countries across the world a framework against which to measure progress ... but what Millennium Development Goal monitoring did not access is the extent to which the Goals themselves influenced national policymaking and government action". On the basis of intensive analyses of several countries, Sarwar suggested the following as lessons that could be drawn from the Millennium Development Goal experience:

- Countries are more likely to succeed in those intergovernmental goals for which they already have priorities in place. Millennium Development Goals ... have been used to reinforce existing policies

[1] Moizza Binat Sarwar, "National MDG implementation: lessons for the SDG era", Working Paper, No. 428 (London, Overseas Development Institute, 2015). Available from https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/10003.pdf.

- Monitoring agencies will need to be realistic about how long it will be before Sustainable Development Goal progress becomes visible ... [many] national Governments made serious arrangements to integrate the Millennium Development Goals only after a 10-year time lag

- Given how national priorities can [be] and are often different from the needs of local areas, an important point of discussion is whether the Millennium Development Goals would have had more political traction if engagement with the goals had been more localized

- Middle-income countries engaged with the Millennium Development Goals to further strategic regional interests ... Low-income country Governments' subscription to the language and process of the Goals appears to have been linked to accessing overseas donor assistance linked to the targets. For the Sustainable Development Goals, this implies that international donors need to engage in different ways accordingly, and that national civil society organizations will be important in furthering the Sustainable Development Goal agenda

- Monitoring the pace of and political drivers behind adoption and prioritization of Sustainable Development Goal targets on a regular basis would provide crucial data for reviewing and evaluating the Goals

4. To gain a better understanding of the institutional processes and structures that are likely to facilitate successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the present paper will briefly examine the experiences of four countries — Germany, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa — as they gear up to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The specific countries were chosen in part because they have had varying degrees of experience in seeking to introduce sustainable development policies into their national agendas and in implementing the Millennium Development Goals. No claim is made that they are adequately representative of worldwide experience in implementation of the Millennium Development Goals or in start-up of the Sustainable Development Goals. They are, however, illustrative of the experiences of many countries. Following the country reviews, 10 suggestions are presented that build upon insights drawn from the case studies of the four countries and from accepted good practices in the areas of effective policy development and implementation as well as from the discipline of public administration.

II. Preparing to implement the Sustainable Development Goals: building upon the Millennium Development Goal experience

5. Each country's efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals will require the actions of its principal governmental institutions. While those basic governmental institutions often appear to have remarkable similarities, as a consequence of historic, economic, and cultural differences, there are frequently significant differences in the ways they function. The differences are often not evident when examining the basic government institutional framework but they are very evident in any detailed examination of the ways in which the institutions

actually function. Consequently, it is very important that those seeking to implement the Goals understand the manner in which such institutions work. Although it was not possible to include extensive descriptions of the four countries in the present paper, that information will appear in a forthcoming paper complementary to this one, by the same authors. The case studies in that paper will include brief descriptions of the nature and structure of governmental institutions and more detailed descriptions of the institutional architecture established for the purposes of implementing the Goals.[2]

Germany

6. The formal commitment of Germany to sustainable development policies can be traced to the adoption in 2002 of its National Sustainable Development Strategy. The Strategy is referred to as a "living document",[3] since it has been continuously updated every four years, accompanied by progress reports with measurable indicators to evaluate progress. With implementation of the Strategy, Germany has put in place a significant institutional framework for planning and implementing sustainable initiatives.

7. Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations in 2015, Germany has been working to identify the gaps in its National Sustainable Development Strategy. While the 2002 Strategy is a comprehensive document that has already achieved sustainable development success, significant gaps do exist in terms of its relevance to the Goals. For example, it has been largely focused on national initiatives and has lacked the global focus promoted by the Goals. To fully integrate the Goals, a decision was reached to revise the Strategy and adopt a new version of the document by late 2016.

8. In the preparation of the revised national sustainable development strategy, all levels of government have been involved. While the Federal Chancellery is the lead agency, intergovernmental cooperation has been sought. The State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development is responsible for the implementation and update of the strategy, while each government department is charged with contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In the preparation of the strategy, every ministry analysed the Goals and the ways in which their achievement could be integrated into the revised strategy. To ensure consistent implementation of the strategy, the Federal Chancellery consults with each of the federal ministries regarding the progress being made.

9. The 249-page draft of the new strategy was made publicly available in May 2016.[4] State and non-State stakeholders were able to submit comments regarding the

[2] The co-authors have drawn upon the dissertation by Rachel Emas for various aspects of the case study material for Germany and South Africa. See Rachel Emas, "Success and shortcomings in the implementation of national sustainable development strategies: from the greening of governance to the governance of greening", PhD dissertation, Florida International University, 2015.

[3] Imme Scholz, Niels Keijzer and Carmen Richerzhagen, "Promoting the Sustainable Development Goals in Germany", Discussion Paper (Bonn, German Development Institute, 2016). Available from https://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/DP_13.2016.pdf.

[4] See Germany, Bundestegierung, *Deutsche Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie: Neuauflage 2016* (Berlin, 2016). Available from https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/StatischeSeiten/Breg/Nachhaltigkeit/0-Buehne/2016-05-31-download-nachhaltigkeitsstrategie-entwurf.pdf?__blob=publicationFile.

strategy until 31 July 2016. The final draft of the strategy, which was to be adopted in late 2016, reviews the background of sustainable development in Germany, its challenges and the ever-evolving institutional framework put in place beginning with the 2002 Strategy. The document focuses on each Sustainable Development Goal individually and proposes actions that the Government will undertake to implement them. There is a strong international focus, with Germany reaffirming its commitment to assistance to other countries implementing the Goals. The draft also introduces specific indicators to track progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Altogether, the number of measurable indicators has increased from 38 (under the previous Strategy) to 61 under the revised draft. Every two years, the Federal Statistical Office will be analysing and publishing reports regarding Germany's improvement with regard to the 61 indicators. The revised strategy will continue to be a living document, to be further developed and updated every four years. While the revised strategy had not yet been adopted as of November 2016, Germany had made significant progress in the policy formulation stage.

Indonesia

10. Shortly after adoption of the Millennium Declaration in 2000, the Millennium Development Goals began to be included in major national planning documents of Indonesia, such as the National Long-Term Plan 2005-2025, and in various budget documents.[5] A national Millennium Development Goal coordinating team was established under the Ministry of National Development Planning. Local governments were required to prepare subnational action plans outlining how the Goals were to be implemented locally. Out of 67 indicators, 49 were achieved in Indonesia, while 18 remained unfinished by 2015.

11. Indonesia has been actively developing a post-2015 agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals.[5] The main document addressing national development is the National Long-Term Development Plan 2005-2025, mandated by Law No. 25/2004. The Ministry of National Development Planning is in charge of drafting national development plans and, since 2014, has reported to the Office of the President. Since national development plans are binding in Indonesia, local governments are expected to develop and implement complementary development plans.

12. Implementation of the National Long-Term Development Plan is expected to span four major stages, each lasting five years and corresponding to the election cycles. In 2014, the Government released the Medium-Term Development Plan 2015-2019, the third stage of implementation of the long-term plan. The medium-term plan was prepared in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals and focuses on broad objectives that are related to many of the Goals. The Ministry of National Development Planning is to play a key role in implementing the plan and is responsible for its development, monitoring and evaluation of implementation, further development of later stages of the long-term plan, data management and coordination of the implementation of the long-term plan.[6]

[5] Indonesia, *National Medium-Term Development Plan 2015-2019* (2014).

[6] Kemenerian Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional/Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional (Bappenas), "History of Bappenas", available from http://www.bappenas.go.id/en/profil-bappenas/sejarah/.

13. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals will begin in 2017 and will be completed by 2030. However, one important issue that Indonesia may face in implementing the Goals, as in other countries, is public sector corruption. Salaries of civil servants in Indonesia are generally quite low, and corruption persists in government procurement and in other activities.[7] Another issue is the absence of a clear-cut distribution of policy and administrative authority, both horizontally and vertically. Authority overlaps between national ministries lead to ambiguity in policy implementation and coordination. Vertically, overlaps of authority exist between the central and local governments. Conflicting laws and regulations lead to the intervention of provincial governments in matters that should be the responsibility of district and city governments.[7]

14. Given current circumstances, including partially completed decentralization efforts, the formulation of development plans at the different levels of government may not guarantee successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.[8] The central and subnational governments may need to establish clearer patterns of authority and cooperation as well as to resolve existing overlaps and gaps in policy design and implementation. In addition, there is an urgent need to strengthen local government financial capacity and address regional socioeconomic disparities to facilitate effective implementation of the Goals between now and 2030.

Mexico

15. Beginning in 2000, Mexico initiated efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals. A progress report published in 2013 provides a detailed account of Mexico's success and challenges in the implementation of the Goals. At that time, out of 51 measurable indicators, 38 had been met, while 5 were progressing towards being met by 2015. To implement the Goals, Mexico put in place an institutional structure for oversight and monitoring, with the Office of the President playing a central role in coordinating implementation. In Mexico, most public programmes related to the Goals have been in place since 2001. A major step in Mexico's implementation of the Goals was the establishment of the Millennium Development Goal Specialized Technical Committee, headed by the Office of the Chief of Staff to the President. It included participants from a number of Mexican government agencies charged with implementing policies connected to the Goals.

16. Mexico does not have a specific strategy for sustainable development, but the National Development Plan 2013-2018 includes a sustainable development element. The Government published the Plan in 2013. It includes five long-term goals: (a) Mexico in peace; (b) inclusive Mexico; (c) quality education; (d) prosperous Mexico; and (e) Mexico with global responsibility. For each of the five broad goals outlined above, objectives, strategies and action areas are found in the Plan. Measurable indicators to track the progress of implementation are presented.

[7] Agus Pramusinto, "Weak central authority and fragmented bureaucracy: a study of policy implementation in Indonesia", in Jon S. T. Quah, ed., *The Role of the Public Bureaucracy in Policy Implementation in Five ASEAN Countries* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[8] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Green Growth in Bandung, Indonesia*, OECD Green Growth Studies (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2016).

17. Mexico is currently in the process of aligning national programmes with the Sustainable Development Goals. It has established a new committee, the Specialized Technical Committee for the Sustainable Development Goals, comprising the same agencies that led the Millennium Development Goal Specialized Technical Committee (which monitored those Goals). In addition, the new technical committee includes eight agencies that were not part of the Millennium Development Goal committee, thus bringing the number of participating institutions to 23.

18. The first stage of the work of the Specialized Technical Committee for the Sustainable Development Goals involved identifying measurable indicators and assigning them to respective agencies, according to the policy area. Later, indicators will be defined and adjusted to the national situation, at which stage various non-governmental stakeholders, such as civil society, academia and the private sector, will be involved.[9]

19. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals will be headed by the Office of the Presidency and will build on the existing administrative structures, which are used for implementing the National Development Plan. It is felt that the success of the Goals' implementation in Mexico depends on the buy-in of the chief executive and leadership at the highest level of Government. The Congress will, in turn, work to allocate a sufficient budget to fund the initiatives required to implement the Goals. The National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), as in the case of the Millennium Development Goals, will be responsible for monitoring and maintaining statistical information on the Sustainable Development Goals and making it publicly available online.

20. While Mexico has taken steps towards adopting the 2030 Agenda, the country faces some significant challenges that could hinder its implementation. One issue is the need to continue enhancing public participation mechanisms. For example, options for citizen participation are limited in most budgetary decision-making processes.[10] At the local level, some municipalities lack any public participation mechanisms.[11] Ensuring public participation is key for successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Hearing citizens and citizen groups can build on public awareness initiatives, increase the chances of getting broad public buy-in for the Sustainable Development Goals and create opportunities to gather important feedback in order to design better public policies for their implementation. Another issue of concern, noted by the World Bank, is the prevalence of corruption.[12]

---

[9] Mexico, *Implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in Mexico* (Mexico City, 2016). Available from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10762Brochure%20on%20SDGs%20implementation%20in%20Mexico.pdf.

[10] International Budget Partnership, Budget work by country database, available from http://www.internationalbudget.org/budget-work-by-country/findgroup/group-data/?country=mx.

[11] Ilyana Albarran, "Decentralization and citizen participation in Mexico", PhD dissertation, Florida International University, 2015.

[12] World Bank, World DataBank: Worldwide Governance Indicators database, available from http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=worldwide-governance-indicators.

South Africa

21. The roots of South Africa's commitment to sustainability can be traced back to the 1990s and the adoption of the country's new Constitution, which guaranteed environmental protection for both present and future generations. The country's major sustainable development document, entitled "A national framework for sustainable development in South Africa", was adopted in 2008, driven in part by the Millennium Development Goals. While the framework did not mention specific actions to be undertaken by the Government, it served as a basis for developing a national strategy and action plan.[13]

22. The most comprehensive document for sustainable development, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development and Action Plan, was enacted in 2011. The main body responsible for the implementation of the Strategy was the Department of Environmental Affairs, but the Strategy also mentions national and provincial departments, municipalities, public entities and civil society as implementing bodies. However, South Africa faced significant challenges in its implementation. The sustainable development targets outlined in the strategy were not specific enough, thus creating difficulty in measuring progress. There was also a lack of data on the indicators outlined in the Strategy. A draft progress report, published in 2014 by the Department of Environmental Affairs to evaluate the Strategy's implementation, revealed that out of 138 indicators, 19 were scored "appropriate", 36 "caution" and 83 "reconsider".[14]

23. The National Planning Commission was established in 2010 to develop a long-term strategic plan for South Africa. It is responsible for advising the Government and stakeholders on the implementation of the National Development Plan and for measuring its progress. In 2012, the Commission drafted the most recent major sustainable development document for South Africa, the National Development Plan 2030. The 489-page document outlines two main goals for 2030, eliminating poverty and reducing inequality.[15] The Plan does not mention the Sustainable Development Goals directly, but major overlaps exist between the goals of the National Development Plan 2030 and the Goals. Responsibility for monitoring implementation and outcomes rests with the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation.[16]

24. While it is too early to attempt to assess the achievements of South Africa in terms of addressing the Sustainable Development Goals, there are at least two reasons to be optimistic. First, as a consequence of having been one of the countries

[13] South Africa, Department of Environmental Affairs, *A National Framework for Sustainable Development in South Africa* (2008). Available from https://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/docs/2008nationalframeworkfor_sustainabledevelopment.pdf.

[14] Ibid., *National Strategy for Sustainable Development 1: Monitoring and Evaluation 2nd Draft Report*. Available from http://soer.deat.gov.za/dm_documents/NSSD1_Draft_Report_20_May2014_final_draft_for_comment_vQ62Q.pdf.

[15] South Africa, National Planning Commission, *Our future — make it work: national development plan 2030* (2012). Available from http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/Executive%20Summary-NDP%202030%20-%20Our%20future%20-%20make%20it%20work.pdf.

[16] "The National Development Plan unpacked", *South African Government News Agency*, 19 February 2014. Available from www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/national-development-plan-unpacked.

that were most energetic in seeking to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, South Africa has established a substantial set of governmental structures for implementing sustainable development initiatives. Second, the country did have some significant success in achieving several of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. To some extent, its efforts are reflected in the country's positive movement with regard to various components of the human development index. However, one concern is that in recent years there may have been a significant decline in stakeholder engagement, which could prove problematic for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

III. Ten recommendations for effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

25. Each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals is of great importance for the future well-being of all societies. Hence, there really may not be a specific priority in terms of the urgency of their implementation, and no effort is being made in the present paper to prioritize them. Nevertheless, Goal 16, the latter part of which speaks to broad issues involved in, among other things, building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, in all probability is the single most important of all 17 Goals. If the four case studies suggest nothing else, not to mention prior studies and analyses of the problems inherent in implementing the Millennium Development Goals, it is that national efforts at implementing the Sustainable Development Goals are likely to rise or fall on government capacity and the effectiveness of a country's public sector. This is because the capacity of nation States to bring about the very significant economic, environmental and social achievements inherent in the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is highly dependent upon the capacity of their government institutions to mobilize the substantial resources required — financial, institutional and human.

26. As noted above, efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals will have one important advantage, and that is the knowledge and experience gained by countries through their prior efforts in attempting to implement the Millennium Development Goals. As studies of Millennium Development Goal implementation have shown and also as noted in the present paper in the various country case studies, the reality is that in many cases, it often took two thirds of the 15-year implementation period to align a country's national development goals with the Millennium Development Goals. In terms of implementing efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, another significant advantage is that, in many cases, the authorities responsible for shaping a country's efforts at implementing them will be able to rely very heavily upon the institutional architecture created to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Nevertheless, there are several important points suggested by the case studies and other analyses that those seeking to effectively implement the Sustainable Development Goals need to keep in mind.

Remember the central role of government

27. Across many parts of the world, the last four decades have not been the best of times for the public sector. Throughout this period, government and its institutions

have been under attack from critics of all kinds and types. In some countries, government programmes and policies have frequently been attacked as bureaucratic, ineffective and, in some cases, even harmful and counterproductive. Consequently, the level of distrust in the various institutions of government has grown dramatically. In some countries, resources that might logically have been invested in building government capacity have, for many years, been diverted to the private sector and/or non-governmental organizations. In other countries, anti-government attitudes may inhibit capacity to mobilize needed resources.

28. One response to anti-government attitudes — one often encouraged by numerous international organizations, including the World Bank and the United Nations — has been to encourage movement towards "collaborative governance". The inherent underlying presumption is that government acting alone cannot adequately respond to society's problems. Rather, to be effective, government is dependent upon establishing cooperative relationships with the private and non-governmental sectors. While collaborative governance, where government engages mostly in joint initiatives with the private or the non-profit sectors, or both, can have benefits, there are also costs and complications.

29. Ultimately, the private sector is defined by the need to seek profit, which often requires the pursuit of self-interest and may undermine the public interest. Non-governmental organizations will generally lack the capacity to bring about the large-scale societal and economic change required for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and, in some cases, may be self-interested and/or rather fragile institutions. Moreover, in the end, only government has the ultimate responsibility to produce a good society. Government remains the most important enabling institution of any society. If government is effective, one can have a productive, accountable society, a good society with a complementarily successful private sector. If government is not effective, such a good society is unlikely to be realized, since it is government that must establish the foundations and context within which all of the other institutions of society function.

Recognize the centrality of an adequate and dependable revenue base

30. For many countries, implementing the Sustainable Development Goals will be an expensive task. In many instances, especially in transitional and developing countries, governments generally, especially regional and local, possess limited revenue-raising capacity, thus limiting their ability to effectively implement the Goals. These resource limitations inevitably constrain governments in providing the services that their citizens require and in playing a needed role in the process of institution-building.

31. The authority and capacity to raise revenue at all levels of government, whether through taxes and fees, or assumption of debt, is essential to the building of strong governments. That is the case not only because adequate revenue is a prerequisite to the provision of effective public services, but also because the responsibility of having to raise revenue ultimately motivates public officials to remain attentive to the concerns of constituents, who may vote them in or out of office, and behave responsively. Public officials who do not have the authority of imposing taxes can more readily pass important governing responsibilities on to others.

Effective budgeting and planning processes are at the heart of government capacity

32. There is no more important annual document produced by any government than its budget. The budget reflects both the specific priorities and the general goals of the government for the period of time for which it has been established. That is why it is critical that budgetary processes be open and transparent and that the staff of the budget agency be both competent professionals and committed to operating in a transparent manner. It is also very important, as illustrated in the case studies, that the country's main budgetary agency, whether it be the ministry of finance or a comparable agency, work closely with the agency that has been given responsibility for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

33. Almost as important as an effective budgetary process is an effective planning process. In particular, planning activities, if they are to be effective, must involve a wide spectrum of the citizenry and be relevant for all stakeholders. As the case studies suggest, one of the major criticisms and problems in the process of Millennium Development Goal implementation was the lack of inclusive citizen and/or community involvement, especially at the local level. Community-based planning that reflects the needs of the entire community — its women, its children, its elderly, its poor, its minorities, its youth — is perhaps the single most effective means to develop priorities that truly reflect the needs of a nation's community. Consequently, the implementation of participatory strategic planning techniques and the linking of the outcomes of such processes to the development of budget priorities is very important for the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Citizen empowerment is a prerequisite to effective Government

34. One of the features of democratic governance is the involvement of the people who are being governed in the shaping of governmental decisions and policies. However, all too often, only some of the people are effectively involved in, or able to influence their governments, even at the local level. The poor and the marginalized may have little or no influence on the decisions of national or local governments. Such a situation serves to undermine the effectiveness of government — both as a democratic institution and as a generator of needed economic and social development. It also will ensure that the Sustainable Development Goal priority to "leave no one behind" will very likely not be met.

35. Consequently, it is critical that efforts to build and strengthen government include major initiatives to encourage the empowerment of all citizens, especially the poor and the marginalized. Programmes that reach out to the poor, whether they live in cities or the countryside, and that provide them with adequate information to understand both the opportunities for, and the responsibilities inherent in, self-government are critical for the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. As experience in many highly developed countries has shown, such initiatives can have significant benefits in promoting social well-being and economic growth.

Accountability and transparency are essential for citizen confidence

36. Throughout the world, citizens are increasingly demanding that government be both accountable and transparent. This is true at all levels of government because citizen confidence in government is very directly related both to its responsiveness and to its openness to their participation and involvement. For citizens to participate effectively in government, they must be able to understand how it functions and what it does. Local governments have a special opportunity to set new standards of excellence in terms of accountability and transparency and, in so doing, to help reverse the growing trend of citizen disillusionment with government institutions.

The critical importance of local capacity

37. In many parts of the world, highly centralized Governments tend to concentrate both political and economic power in their capital cities. Frequently, this serves to work against the interests of the other cities and communities within a country. When power is highly centralized in national Governments and their capital cities, other communities often have great difficulty in creating the needed enabling environment to facilitate community and economic development. Typically, in such situations, outside of the capital city, there is a lack of the revenue needed to create the infrastructure necessary to facilitate private sector investment and consequent economic development. Decentralized governance, with effective local governments, can much more readily mobilize the resources and authority needed to provide significantly greater opportunities for meaningful and responsive local economic development.

38. One can get a good sense of the connection between economic development and the strength of subnational governance in a country simply by comparing data regarding the proportion of governmental expenditures spent at the subnational level with levels of national economic development. In the highly economically developed Western European and North American countries and Japan, in excess of 40 per cent (as high as 50 or 60 per cent) of all governmental spending takes place at the subnational level, while in the economically less developed parts of the world, the figure ranges from 3 to 30 per cent. Data from the World Bank Institute further illustrate the importance of a strong subnational government resource base. In North America and Europe, 57 per cent of all public sector employment is at the subnational level, while in Africa the figure is 6 per cent; in Latin America, 21 per cent; and in Asia, 37 per cent. Thus, in both governmental spending and personnel, there is a strong correlation between the proportion of both public employees and expenditures found at the subnational level and the degree of national economic development.

39. The relationship described above is understandable. Local government capacity, including revenue-raising capacity and authority to enact relevant local legislation, is critical for successful local economic development. Putting in place the appropriate legal framework and the necessary physical infrastructure is a precondition of economic productivity. Absent such capacity, local entrepreneurs are often unable to initiate greatly needed new economic activity which is likely to be critical for the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Strong management capacity and information systems are important

40. There is no one best way to structure a governmental system. Countries often reflect significant variations in the formal structures of national and subnational governments and with regard to the services carried out at the national, regional, local or community levels. Many highly economically developed countries tend to devolve education and health services to the regional or local level, but even in these areas there is much variation. The structuring of national and subnational governments and the issue of which services will be carried out at what level are usually a product of some combination of past history, citizen demand, local traditions, administrative capacity, organizational and institutional self-interest, perceived efficiency and political negotiation. Moreover, these decisions are almost never set in stone. Adjustments are frequently made between the central and the local governments regarding roles and responsibilities.

41. While there is no one best structural arrangement for national Governments, the management capacity of almost all governments could be significantly enhanced. This is the case in both developed and developing countries. In some instances, at both the national and subnational government levels, there is a lack of adequately trained staff. Governments may also be slow in generating the kind of information citizens need to respond effectively to complex contemporary public issues. Critically needed performance measurement and quality management systems may be less than adequately implemented, and in many countries, at both the national and subnational levels, basic management processes, including personnel systems, budgeting and accounting practices, may be lacking. The effective implementation of such systems is critical to maintaining public confidence and trust in government and to the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Strengthen the partnership between local and central governments

42. The growth and emergence of local government around the world has certainly been one of the notable achievements of the institution-building and governance-strengthening efforts of the past several decades. Grass-roots activists, local leaders, national leaders and international organizations have all contributed to the strengthening of local governance. However, it does appear that the past decade has witnessed a decline in the commitment of many national Governments in this area. This is occurring in most parts of the world and is a serious concern, given especially the demonstrated importance of local governments for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. National Governments, through their legislation and through their fiscal policies, significantly shape the environment within which local governments operate and can limit or support their capacity to act effectively.

43. Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals requires national government policymakers and institutions to provide strong support for local governments. Their support may take the form of enacting enabling and other types of legislation that provide subnational governments with the capacity to act autonomously and provide services needed for the effective implementation of the Goals. Frequently, the financial resources needed to provide assigned service responsibilities are lacking. Often, where there have been decentralization efforts,

national Governments continue to regulate local activities closely as well as limit their capacity to raise the revenue necessary to fund local services.

44. As the experience with the Millennium Development Goals has shown, even the most supportive national Government, if acting alone, cannot adequately ensure full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. There has to be significant local demand and concern for the development and maintenance of effective decentralized governmental systems. However, central Governments may not be keen to give up either the resources or the authority to control them. In practice, the need to encourage decentralization, build local government capacity and facilitate citizen participation may gain a foothold only when there is pressure from the local community to carry out such reforms.

45. It is of critical importance that officials at all levels of government, as well as civil society representatives, be committed to working together to create the appropriate institutional mechanisms for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. It is especially necessary that those at both the local and national levels recognize that the strengthening of levels of government is not a zero-sum game, in the sense that, if one level of government is enhanced, another will inevitably become weaker. Much contemporary experience, particularly in those countries where governmental institutions are the most highly developed, suggests the opposite. When one level of government becomes institutionally stronger and more competent, pressure builds for other levels of government to follow suit.

Build coalitions with civil society and the private sector

46. The private sector has been an important part of shaping the progress and the well-being of all countries, especially the industrialized countries. An important development during the past decade for those concerned about the future of democracy has been the emergence of civil society organizations and grass-roots activism. Through its own independent activities and, increasingly, through its ability to influence other institutions, the private sector and its representatives have long shaped the policies and actions of national and local governments in important ways. In more recent years, civil society organizations have begun to do so as well.

47. It is also important to keep in mind that governments, at both the national and local levels, can create environments that are friendly to and supportive of private sector and civil society growth or that hinder their progress. Through the protection of such rights as freedom of speech, association and press, as well as through a variety of specific legislative actions, including taxation, financial support and regulatory activity, government can profoundly impact the ability of civil society and private sector institutions to develop and flourish, thereby impacting in significant ways their ability to support the most effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

48. It is crucial that both national and subnational governments work in partnership with the private sector and civil society organizations to explore the most effective means for delivering services to the citizens of any given community. In some cases, it may well be that civil society organizations represent a more effective means for the delivery of some services necessary for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Sometimes private sector capacity can be very

important. However, it is equally imperative that governments recognize that in the end they bear the main responsibility for implementing the Goals and the building of the good society that their implementation will produce. Consequently, governments must not abdicate their responsibility for the delivery of needed services to their citizenry on the assumption that either the private sector or civil society organizations can provide them. The role of government is especially important when the most effective delivery of services requires the involvement of all levels of government.

Recognize the complexity and fragility of reform processes

49. The process of policy reform and programme implementation is a complex and difficult one. One must negotiate among many well-established interests with strong needs and/or desires to maintain existing policy and practice. Such groups will sometimes resist efforts to bring about change, especially systematic reform. In transitional and developing countries, the problem of institutionalizing reform can be even more complex if the institutions of government are too weak. In other instances, when reforms are implemented, the pressure to revert back to past procedures and practices is often very strong.

50. The process of institutional change and/or reform can be further complicated by the fact that many of the external organizations that support and encourage such efforts in a country may approach these matters with a short-term perspective. The key advocates and supporters of reform may leave the scene much too soon, giving those who wish to lessen or obviate the impact of reform the opportunity to do so with little or no resistance. In other cases, economic or political circumstances may go beyond the control of participants in any reform process and complicate and undermine reform initiatives. Consequently, at the national and subnational levels, it is crucial that those involved in the process of building and/or reforming the institutions of government with a view to effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the achievement of social progress recognize that such efforts often require much patience and a long-term commitment. Just as there will be successes, there may also be disappointments. Nevertheless, the lessons of history make it clear that with sustained effort and commitment, significant progress, where and when needed, can be achieved.

III. Conclusions

51. In the present paper, the progress of four countries in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals has been briefly reviewed. Following that review, 10 recommendations were presented for strengthening the governmental institutions whose effective performance is essential for the successful implementation of the Goals. In the cases studied, most activity regarding implementation of the Goals has so far been focused upon initial steps for policy formulation. All four countries had sustainable development and/or national development strategies prior to adoption of the Goals. Germany has taken steps to revise its national sustainable development strategy and address each Goal specifically. In Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa, the goals and objectives of the national development strategies are mostly comparable to, and in synergy with, the Sustainable Development Goals. To

eliminate any possible mismatch between national development plans and the Goals, countries may wish to review and revise national development strategies in the light of the Goals. Successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be facilitated by formulating policies that correspond to individual Goals, while taking into account varying national situations.

52. In each of the cases presented, there is a high degree of continuity in terms of sustainable development policies. Germany, over the last 20 years, has built an institutional infrastructure for designing and implementing sustainable development strategies. It has utilized that structure for drafting the revised national sustainable development strategy, while aligning it with the Sustainable Development Goals. Such structures will also be used to implement the revised strategy. The three other countries (Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa), to varying degrees, developed structures and procedures to implement the Millennium Development Goals that will be useful for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, prior experience with the Millennium Development Goals has helped countries to learn what works in their national context, and what can be done to improve policy formulation and implementation in the future. Additionally, institutional structures developed for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of progress in sustainable development more generally, as well as public participation measures designed while implementing the Millennium Development Goals, will aid in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. By putting prior experience to use, countries can significantly reduce the amount of new administrative resources needed to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

53. Participation of various non-State stakeholders, developed previously, will further help in designing better-informed solutions and obtaining critically needed community buy-in for the Sustainable Development Goals. Germany made the draft of its revised strategy available to citizens for public comment. South Africa, especially in its early efforts at defining a national sustainable development policy, utilized a number of platforms for obtaining public engagement in the process. More recently, during the 2016 high-level political forum on sustainable development, Mexico indicated a commitment to establishing mechanisms of public participation that would inform the implementation of the National Development Plan. While some public participation mechanisms already exist in all four countries, the mechanisms can in each instance be enhanced. This is a concern for almost all countries in implementing the Goals and is especially the case in those countries where citizen voices may often not be heard owing to public corruption or repressive elites, especially at the local levels.

54. The existing national strategies for sustainable development should be devised as living documents. Since the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals will last over the course of 15 years, it is imperative that governments continuously evaluate their success at achieving them through monitoring and evaluation utilizing measurable indicators. Tracking progress fosters a learning process, which enables governments to update their policy strategies to match policy actions as the strategies are evolving in accordance with national situations.

55. One major challenge that all countries face in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is the localization of the Goals and targets. In the case of the Millennium Development Goals, local governments often had little or no

knowledge of the goals and thus were not in a position to reflect on how to align their priorities with national priorities in the corresponding areas. As a consequence, they were unable to effectively mobilize needed resources or to bring about the alignment of national government policies in such a manner as to maximize possibilities for successful implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, the varying capabilities of subnational governments and the variation in the allocation of governmental responsibilities and services between national and subnational governments represent a particularly difficult problem to be addressed. In Germany, governmental responsibilities are clearly divided between different levels of government. That may not always be the case in Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa, or in many other countries.

56. In each of the countries studied for this paper, there is considerable ambiguity about the sharing of responsibilities between national, regional and local governments. For instance, in South Africa, it sometimes may not be clear which services are in the jurisdiction of a provincial or a municipal government. As a result, implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals could be hindered, since, as the recent experience with the Millennium Development Goals has shown, local ownership of the Goals is a necessary condition for success. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals may also be impeded by varying degrees of local government capacity. For example, there are substantial regional and local disparities in economic development in many countries, especially between urban and rural areas. National Governments must dedicate resources to building government capacity at both the national and local levels to aid in the implementation of the Goals. Most importantly, governments at all levels must continue to work directly with the not-for-profit, non-governmental sectors and the private sector if implementation of the Goals is to be achieved.

57. Finally, as noted at the outset of this paper, and as clearly illustrated by the experience of the Millennium Development Goals, achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will require the mobilization of very significant amounts of resources, both financial and human, as well as the reliance upon existing and, in some instances, newly created governmental institutions. Any effort to mobilize the kind of resources needed to implement the Sustainable Development Goals will require strong leadership and great commitment. The leadership of a country must involve the leading figures of its governments, national and subnational, but cannot stop there. It must engage a very broad spectrum of the entirety of the country, including its private and non-governmental sectors and the great bulk of its citizenry as well. One of the most important lessons of the Millennium Development Goal experience is that, while important progress was made in achieving them, and in so doing, in moving forward in the building of good societies, greater national commitment and engagement ultimately was needed. Such commitment requires major initiatives to make the Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives that they represent far more well known to people all over the world. It is important that such efforts be initiated immediately and become a much more central part of the efforts to make the 2030 Agenda, and the benefits that its implementation will bring about, a reality for the entirety of the world's people.